

By .... John S Nelson

## CHAPTER 1 - The Introduction of Sloper's System.

In October 1857, Joseph Sloper, a London builder was granted patent rights over his invention of the system of perforation as a means of protecting cheques, documents, etc., against fraudulent use. His patent rights covered not only the basic principle of perforating with words, letters, marks or devices for security purposes but also the machinery for producing the perforations.

The invention was particularly intended for use in Banks for crossing and cancelling cheques, but it had a wide variety of potential applications one of which was the protection of postage stamps against theft.

It is to be remembered that Postal Orders had not then been introduced and postage stamps were commonly used for making small remittances. These could be encashed at Post Offices, at the discretion of Postmasters, at a charge of 2½% (minimum charge ½d) provided that in every case there was a minimum of two stamps joined together, single stamps not being accepted.

With the Post Office providing unscrupulous persons with this facility to turn stolen stamps into cash, commercial firms and others whose business involved the use of quantities of postage stamps were becoming increasingly troubled by the theft of stamps from them.

By the middle of the eighteen-sixties various methods of protecting stamps against theft were being considered, and one or two firms enquired of Joseph Sloper whether his system of perforation might be applied for this purpose. The difficulty was, however, that unlike other protective methods, perforation interfered with the face of the stamp and actually removed portions of it and, since to be valid a stamp could not be 'torn, cut, or otherwise rendered imperfect', the Post Office would almost certainly consider perforated stamps to have been invalidated. Thus it was essential for enquiries to be made of the Post Office first of all to see if they would permit stamps perforated with firm's initials to be used.

It is interesting to note that it was not Joseph Sloper who first made application to the Postal Authorities for official permission to use his system, but one of his early customers, Messrs. Copestake, Moore, Cramton & co., the firm of wholesale drapery warehousemen, then of 5, Bow Churchyard, London, E.C., a member of whose staff had, at their Plymouth branch, recently been detected stealing their stamps. In a letter to the Postmaster General, dated 23rd October 1867, they sought permission to have their stamps underprinted with the firm's name prior to the application of the gum and also to perforate stamps with the

initials "S.C.", those of their senior partner, Mr Samson Copestake. These initials would, they said, be recognised only by themselves so there could be no suggestion that the stamps were to be used for the purposes of advertisement.. It was explained that whilst the underprinting was to protect stamps purchased for their own use, they also received stamps as remittances from the country and it was proposed to protect these from possible theft by perforating them immediately on arrival at their London office.

Authority to-underprint was given on the 25th October 1867 (as it had been previously to J.C. Boyd w Co., in July 1866 and to W.H. Smith & Son in April 1867) but the request regarding perforation was ignored altogether. Early in January 1868 the firm wrote again-drawing the attention of the Postmaster General to his omission and enclosedd as specimens several stamps perforated with the letters "S.C.".

A reply was received by return refusing them permission to perforate in the manner suggested. The reason given was that the Post Office feared that perforation might be used as a means of taking out obliterating marks faintly or partially applied thus making a stamp available for use again. It was suggested as an alternative that Copestakes might apply their name with a small hand-stamp to the backs of all stamps received by them as remittances on arrival at their-office.

The work of producing. the specimen stamps perforated "S.C." which were submitted by Copestakes in January 1868, was that of Joseph Slopes to whom the firm handed the letter received from the Post Office. Slopes then took steps to arrange his first official interview and, by appointment, called at the General Post Office on the 12th February 1858 "to exhibit his system" of stamp protection.

On the 15th February he wrote to the Postmaster General saying, inter alia, that following his interview he had called on Copestake, 'Hoore, Cramton & Co., "and informed them that on examining the stamps and seeing that it (perforation) did not interfere with the obliterating stamp as letters or marks would if printed on the face of the stamps that you saw no objection to the use of it, at which they were much pleased, as also were one or two other very large firms who intended using it for the protection against the misappropriation of stamps".

It was clear to the Post Office that Sloper had misrepresented what had taken place at the interview, and the receipt of his letter was followed by a request for him to attend for a meeting on the 24th February with The Chief Clerk, Mr Rodie Parkhurst, at which he was told that he had exceeded his authority and that he had not obtained official sanction to introduce his system to the extent that he had reported to Copestakes.

Sloper wrote again on the 27th February emphasising the need for his system as evidenced by statements made by leading firms and public companies that it was the only method of protecting them from robbery of their stamps by their employees, "I shall feel particularly obliged if you would honour me with a reply, however brief, at your earliest convenience"; he concluded "in order that I may assure my numerous clients that this system meets with no opposition from the Post Office Authorities.

Enclosed with his letter, as further proof of the need for acceptance of his system, was a cutting from the "Manchester examiner" of 21st February, 1868 reporting the case of one John Howarth, a provision dealer of Cross Street, charged in Manchester Police Court with receiving 7,820 stamps worth £35.19.2d from various errand boys and junior clerks in payment for bread and cheese, well knowing them to have been stolen from their employers.

Since Sloper's letter was asking for a definite ruling as to whether or not his system was to be authorised, the matter was passed to LJr Frank I. Scudamore, the Second Secretary to the Postmaster General, who asked two officials to give consideration to the matter and to submit reports. The officials concerned were Mr Thomas Boucher, the Controller of the Circulation Department, and Mr J. St. Lawrence Beaufort, the Postmaster of Manchester.

The former objected to the system on the grounds firstly that perforating could be made use of to take out obliterations, secondly that it would deface the stamp which should be perfect and intact and, thirdly, that it would afford an opportunity of piecing together unobliterated portions to make up a complete stamp. Mr Boucher also mentioned in his report the possibility that perforated stamps may have already passed through the post unnoticed.

Mr Beaufort, on the other hand, was wholly in favour of the system and had much to say about its advantages to the public, and expressed the view that it was "a much more effective plan than printing on the back because it is always possible to remove the gum, and then the printing also, by chemical application and to re-gum the stamp". He also thought that perforation might be a good deal cheaper to the public than underprinting.

Mr Scudamore was fully in agreement with Mr Beaufort and failed to see the force of the objections raised by Mr Boucher. He reported to the Postmaster General, the Duke of Montrose, on the 11th March 1868 that he and Mr Beaufort approved of Sloper's system and, despite Mr Boucher's objections, recommended that "Mr Sloper be informed that Your Grace will not object to the adoption of the plan".

The Postmaster General agreed and the following letter (which I do not claim to be the first to quote) was written on the 13th March 1868, by the Chief Clerk :

Mr. Sloper,

Sir, - The Postmaster General has had under consideration your letter of the 27th ultimo, and His Grace desires me to inform you that, under the circumstances, he will not object to the perforation of postage stamps in the manner described by you with a view to protect merchants and others, as far as possible, from the theft of the stamps used by them.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

R. PARKHURST.

Thus it may be said with some certainty that the 13th March, 1868 was the earliest date on which postage stamps perforated with initials can have been used with the official permission of the Post Office.

NOTE)-- I am grateful to Mr Jennings for pointing out to me that the early users of Slopers system mentioned by Hugh Vallancey in his booklet on "SPIFS", appeared on an alphabetical list of his early customers prepared by Joseph Sloper himself. Thus Mr Allman was first only because his name began with 'A'.

Copestake, Moore, Crampton & Co., using the initials S.C. for the reasons I have mentioned, appeared (at No 20) on the same list so that this could in fact have been the first perf in ever.

Has anyone any evidence at all of a perfin being in use or in existence before January 1868?

## CHAPTER 2 - 1869-1872

The official letter dated 13th March 1868 can hardly have been exactly what Sloper had hoped for, but it implied sufficient authority for him to put his system in to operation. Without knowing it however, the Post Office had conferred a temporary monopoly on him, for, with the protection provided by his 1858 patent he was the only person who could legally manufacture machines for perforating documents, etc., for security purposes.

Accordingly, he immediately set about publicising his system and establishing this new branch of his business with increasing success.

The Post Office on the other hand took some time about officially advising Postmasters that the system had been approved, because it was not until almost a year later that the following Notice appeared in the Postal Official Circular (Postmasters' Edition) for Monday 1st March 1869:

Postage Stamps

In consequence of representations made to the Post Office by various Firms that there is reason to believe that their postage stamps are purloined by persons in their employ, the Department has recommended that the name or initials of Firms, &c be either printed on the back of the stamps, or perforated through the stamps by means of a machine devised 'for the purpose, so that, inasmuch as the sale of such stamps would thereby be rendered difficult, the temptation to steal them might be lessened or altogether removed.

Postmasters will take care not to purchase any postage stamps thus marked which may be offered to them for sale.

A Notice to the public in similar terms first appeared as part of Rule 224 in the British Postal Guide for 13th April 1869 and later, as from 1st January 1873, became Rule 7 on page 21.

As time went on, so Sloper received more and more enquiries about his system, many coming from abroad, and anxious to extend the sphere of his business to foreign countries he wrote to the Secretary of the Post Office on the 23rd May 1870 as follows :-

OFFICE FOR SZOPER'S PATENTS  
Walbrook House, Walbrook, E.C.  
London. 23rd May, 1870.

To the Secretary of the Post Office, London.  
Sir,

Having had repeated applications from Foreign

Houses, desiring to know if my system of perforating the Initials &c. on Postage Stamps &c. as licenced by the Postmaster General in England, cannot be adopted on the Continent, as it would be of great service, as on the Continent the Commercial community are liable to the same depredations there, as in England.

I am about introducing it personally to the various Governments, and for this purpose, as the system is working so satisfactorily in England, I shall feel much obliged, if My Lord Marquis, the Postmaster General will do me the honour of giving me a letter, stating that his Lordship has authorised my system on postage stamps &c. and recommends it for the public good and also that the system is in operation in other departments of the Post Office.

I have the honour to be

Sir,

Your most obed. & humble servant  
Joseph Sloper.

The Post Office promptly obliged by providing Sloper with the letter he required and it is most probable that this official "reference" played some part in bringing about the introduction of perforated stamps in other countries. The letter, dated 30th May 1870 is set out in full (although quoted somewhat out of its true context) in the booklet "British Stamps Perforated with Firms' Initials (S.P.I.F.S.)" by the late F. Hugh Vallancey.

On 31st August 1872, almost four and a half years after the Postmaster General first authorised the use of Sloper's system, his patent rights, as contained in his 1858 grant, expired. By a further grant of Letters Patent dated 10th December 1872, which covered a variety of modifications and improvements to his existing machines, he endeavoured to extend his monopoly but with no great success.

Others had been waiting to move in on what had hitherto been his exclusive territory, and whilst the 1872 patent reserved for Sloper certain rights in connection with the design and operation of the machines, the actual principle of perforating for security purposes was now free to be adopted by anyone who chose to do so. Others were able to manufacture perforating presses and supply them to the public and to sell stamps ready perforated, the only precaution was to ensure that none of the machinery used infringed Sloper's 1872 patent.

## CHAPTER 3 - "The Full-name Enquiry".

The earliest of Sloper's competitors that I have been able to trace was Eden Fisher, a stationer of 50 Lombard Street, London, E.C.

In a letter to the Postmaster General dated 17th September 1873, Fisher asked if postage stamps would be allowed perforated diagonally with the name "SUTTON" adding, "I am desirous to make this enquiry for a customer previous to making a press". The note endorsed on Fisher's original letter by an official of the Post Office reads; "Answer, no objection to initials being perforated. Refer him to Sloper".

Eden Fisher, of course, had no intention of referring to Sloper, but he was not satisfied with the reply and, on the 9th December, wrote to say that he had seen stamps passed through the Post perforated diagonally "TRAVERS" and used by Messrs. Travers & Son of Cannon Street. He ended his letter, "Please explain why one Firm is more privileged than another".

The Post Office, being quite unaware that Travers, or anyone else for that matter, were using their full name immediately put an enquiry in hand, but as Mr Boucher, the Controller of the Circulation Department, pointed out, Rule 7 on page 21 of the British Postal Guide clearly said that the name or initials of a firm may be perforated through the stamps so that Mr Fisher's application might possibly have to be complied with.

On referring to the British Postal Guide and to the Notice in the Postal Official Circular of 1st March 1869, Mr Parkhurst decided that the word "name" had got in in error. He thereupon asked that Mr Boucher ascertain what London firms, other than Travers, used their entire name and that, if necessary, attention be drawn to the matter in the British Postal Guide. This was duly done and in the Guide for 1st January 1874 the Rule was revised to read, ". . . recommended either that the names of firms &c. be printed on the back of the stamps or the initials perforated through the stamps . . . . "

Having received no acknowledgement to his letter of the 9th December 1873, Eden Fisher wrote again on the 1st January 1874 pressing for a reply and saying that the delay was very annoying. He then received a reply to the effect that Travers had been asked to use initials only in future, as initials fully answered the object in view.

Careful watch was kept on mail passing through the E.C. District Office and on the 2nd January Mr Rushton, the Assistant Chief of the Circulation Department, reported having seen stamps perforated with full names used by the following firms :-

ADAM (John & James) & Co.  
28 Pudding Lane, E.C.

BIRD (Wm.) & Co.  
2 Laurence Poutney Hill, E.C.

GLYN, MILLS, CURRIE &, Co.  
67 Lombard Street, E.C.

GREEN (No further particulars)

HUTH (Frederick) & Co.  
Tokenhouse.Yard, E.C.

HUTTON & Co.  
5 & 6 Newgate Street, E.C.

KEEN, ROBINSON, BELLVILLE & Co.  
6 Garlick Hill, Cannon Street, E.C.

KUHNER (Henry)  
39 Lombard Street, E.C.

ROSE (Sir W.A.) & Co.  
66 Upper Thames Street, E.C.

TRAVERS (Joseph) & SON  
119 Cannon Street, E.C.

On receipt of this report, MT Parkhurst asked that an Official be sent out to each firm asking that, in future, they would perforate initials only, as it was found objectionable by the Post Office to perforate the whole names. For the purpose of protection against fraud initials were amply sufficient.

A Mr Sampson, an Inspector of Letter Carriers, duly called on the offending firms but met with cool reception. Only Messrs. Hutton said they would make the required alteration, Messrs Glyn and Huth asked for a written communication which would be considered. The rest more or less refused to do anything about it, saying that they had been guided in the matter by the Patentee, Mr Sloper, whom they believed held a licence from the Board of Inland Revenue and who knew what was permissible.

Having read Mr Sampson's report, Pdr Parkhurst expressed dissatisfaction but was advised that Mr Sloper would himself be taking the matter up with the Post Office. Sloper was seen by Mr Parkhurst and the matter was discussed but the outcome of the meeting is not known. It seems probable that Sloper explained that quite a number of firms were already using stamps perforated with their full names, apart from the ten in the E.C. area who had been, approached, and that for them all to change would be an expensive affair. Faced with a fait accompli the Post Office must have decided to take no further action although they continued to frown on any designs other than initials. Many firms throughout the years have used their full names and, although the restriction still applies today, some continue to do so.

That this is permitted almost certainly arises out of the realisation by the Post Office a long, long time ago that for



practical purposes the use of full names by a few firms is of no great consequence and, that it is not worthe the bother and expense of doing anything about it.

I can find no foundation to the suggestion that the Post Office has ever authorised the continued use of existing "full name" machines.

## CHAPTER 4 - Discount Difficulties.

Eden Fisher, to whom I referred in Chapter 3, was one of several firms of City stationers who found the stamp perforation service a useful and modestly profitable addition to their usual business. They may for some time have had an effect on Sloper's profits - it is impossible to say - but, if they did, it can have lasted only until 1877 as will be explained later.

A much more serious threat came in the latter part of 1873 when the man who was to become Sloper's chief rival opened up business as a stamp perforator. He was Francis Albert Hancock a printer, stationer, and ticket manufacturer of 37 and 38 Wood Street, London, E.C. Hancock was also the Letter Receiver of the Wood Street Post Office at the same address.

He had, hitherto, advertised his printing and other business in the Trades Section of the Post Office London Directory, but it was in the Directory for 1874 that he first advertised as follows under the heading "Postage Stamp Dealers".

Hancock, Francis A. Wood Street Post  
Office, E.C. and 5, Love Lane, E.C.  
6d allowed to purchasers of 95 postage  
stamps. The initials of firms per-  
forated on all kinds of postage stamps  
cards and wrappers free of charge.  
6d allowed on each sheet of receipt ,  
stamps. Stamps purchased.

Hancock subsequently advertised in the British Postal Guide, the first advertisement appearing on 1st July 1876. Sloper later wrote to the Postmaster General saying, "I consider the advertisement of that man Hancock in the Postal Guide is anything but creditable and detracts much of the dignity which a government paper should claim " Obviously there was no love lost between Sloper and Hancock but it is interesting to note that Sloper himself commenced to advertise in the Guide on the 1st October 1883.

A firm wishing to start using stamps perforated with their initials in the early days had two alternatives. They could either buy their own perforating press and with it perforate stamps purchased at the Post Office or they could, by arrangement, obtain the stamps at face value, already perforated with their initials, from one of the perforating firms. The latter method was preferred by the customer because it involved no outlay and no trouble. It was also preferred by the supplier, because, in the long run, it was by far the most profitable. The profit lay in the stamp discount arrangements in effect at the time.

In December 1852 the Treasury had granted an allowance of poundage of 1% to all licenced vendors of stamps on the condition that not less than £10 worth of postage stamps was purchased at one time at the Head Office of Inland Revenue at Somerset House. In 1870 the Treasury also authorised the allowance of 1% poundage on all purchases of £10 worth of postage stamps obtain-3d from the Post Office, but the Post Office restricted this authority to halfpenny stamps and newspaper wrappers bearing a halfpenny stamp.

Sloper, of course, held a Stamp Vendors Licence as a necessary part of his business-and most of the stationers in the City found it convenient and profitable to sell stamps, both perforated and otherwise, and thus held licences. Hancock, on the other hand, did not need a licence as all persons in the employment of the Post Office were authorised to sell stamps without licence or other authority.

There came in 1877 a blow which threatened the continued existence of the stamp perforating business of Sloper and the stationers, in the form of an announcement that the Inland Revenue would discontinue the 1% discount allowed on stamp purchases as from 1st December 1877. The Post Office on 26th November also announced that, as from the same-date, the discount they had hitherto allowed would also be discontinued.

Hancock was not affected, as an employee of the Post Office he continued to receive his supplies less 1% discount, but for Sloper and the stationers this was an extremely serious matter. Sloper made immediate representations to the Post Office in an endeavour to have the discount continued, explaining that his case was without parallel in that his business could not be carried on without the discount. As he had done on previous occasions, and did on many subsequent occasions, he went to great pains to emphasise the tremendous benefits to the public, government etc., brought about by his system and the importance to everybody (including himself, although he did not say so) that such benefits should be preserved.

At first the Authorities were sympathetic and it seemed they might have made him an exception but for the arrival of a Memorial signed by a group of City stationers asking that their case might be considered exceptional, and requesting the continuance of the discount to them. A deputation from the stationers was received at the General Post Office but, after considering their case, the Post Office decided that no exceptions whatsoever could be made and both they and Sloper were advised accordingly.

## CHAPTER 5 - Sloper Opens His Own Post Office.

Some sympathy for Sloper still existed in the G.P.O. and, in their letter refusing to make him a special case, they pointed out that the 1% discount was still allowed to agents of the Post office and that if he felt that he wished to become an employee, by opening his own letter receiving office, they would see that he was given every recommendation. This being the only way out of his difficulty, Sloper gladly accepted the suggestion, but his troubles were not over. His office at 6 & 7 King William Street, to which he had moved in 1875, was not suitable for use as a Post office in that it was too close to the existing office in Lombard Street. He therefore started to look elsewhere in the district, but various other premises were also unacceptable to the G.P.O. in that they were too close to the Offices at 101 Cannon Street or at Eastcheap. At last, however, he was able to get acceptance of premises at 20 King William Street, this being on the rounded corner formed by the North side of Cannon Street and King William Street, where Stafford House now stands.

Business was restricted to receiving letters, including registered mail, and the sale of postage stamps. The salary agreed was £35 per annum in addition to the 1% poundage allowance, and £400 worth of stamps were to be supplied together with forms of application for fresh supplies. Sloper was required to enter into a fidelity bond for £400.

The negotiations which lead up to the opening of the office on Monday 24th June 1878, were stormy throughout. Sloper was more concerned about his perforating business than he was about being a Post Office official. The G.P.O., on the other hand were being careful to ensure that the establishment was going to be conducted on proper lines as a Receiving Office. There were various disputes and, at one stage, Sloper even tried to dictate the hours his office would be open, but was discouraged by an official from continuing "this foolishness".

Post Office records contain a number of interesting internal memoranda on the subject. One official said, "I cannot say that I contemplate his appointment with any deference or equanimity as I am afraid he will be a troublesome receiver . . . my fear is that the Office will be only too successful for the interests of this Department.

The Official's fears proved to be well founded. For the year ended the 30th June 1879, which almost to the day covered the first year during which Sloper's Post Office was open, the amount earned by him as Postmaster was £1016 : 12 : 5d. This was a fairly considerable sum in those days and was made up as follows,

1% poundage on	Postage Stamps	£805:16:11
"	"	"
"	Telegraph Stamps	£130: 0: 7
"	"	"
"	Receipt Stamps	45:14:11
	Salary	35: 0: 0
		£1016:12: 5

These figures are some indication of the substantial number of perforated stamps being supplied by Sloper at the time. To produce the above mentioned poundage, he would, in the case of postage stamps, have sold over £80,000 worth of which a small proportion only would have been normal counter sales in his post office.

Returns of poundage were made to the G.P.O., every quarter and by the end of 1878 it was decided that some restriction would have to be introduced. It was not only that the amount of poundage being paid to Sloper (and to a lesser extent to Hancock), was quite out of proportion to the services he rendered to the Post Office, but also that the Government was in effect paying for the users of perforated stamps to have them perforated free of charge.

In March 1879 all Postmasters were notified that as from 30th-June 1879, the poundage payable in any one year would be limited to £400. This notice affected no Postmaster except those for whom it was intended namely, Sloper and Hancock, and it is understandable that they both protested to the Post Office in vigorous terms. In Sloper's letter, written on 15th July 1879, which extended to four and a half fullscap pages, he pointed out, (that is after his customary discourse on the value of his system to the public, government etc., etc.) that the Post Office had allowed him to incur expenses, additional rent etc., totalling over £1000 in the first year and only slightly less in the years ahead. Had he known that his poundage was going to be restricted to £400 he would never have contemplated opening the Post Office at all.

Since the specific purpose of the notice had been served there could, of course, be no concession to Sloper or Hancock, and so the period during which one could obtain ones perforated stamps at face value, a period which had lasted almost since the end of Sloper's monopoly in 1872, was now over.

## CHAPTER 6 - Sloper's Competitors

Joseph Sloper died on the 18th June 1890 after which his perforating business was carried on under the name J. Sloper & Co (later J. Sloper & Co., Ltd.) by his two sons Percy and Eustaoe. The Post Office at 20 King William Street was then run quite separately, the letter receiver being a man called Baker. When 20 King William Street was demolished-to make way for a new building in 1914 the firm moved to 22 Budge Row, E.C.4. This office was destroyed during the bombing of London in 1941, and new offices were found at New Bridge Street House near Blackfriars Bridge, where the firm remains to this day.

Whilst there can be no doubt that Slopers have been the leading firm of stamp perforators ever since 1868, there have been a number of others at various, times. During the years from 1880 -1900, when there were probably more different perfina in use than at any other time, there were three other stamp perforators in London with businesses of a size approaching that of Sloper. These were Hancock, (whom I have already mentioned) Allchin, and Braham. Others included James Parsley, the postmaster at 163 Peckham Park Road, S.E., Albert Luff at 26 Ivy Lane, E.C., and the postmasters at Coleman Street, E.C., and Upper Thames Street, E.C.

As mentioned previously, Francis Hancock was Sloper's first and most serious rival.- In 1886 a group of business men, seeing an opportunity of making some profit, persuaded Hancock to sell his business. A company-known as the Initial Perforating Company was then formed to acquire the business, Hancock receiving £1,000 in cash and 100 shares of £10 each in the Company. Hancocks services a Managing Director were retained at £100 per year and a certain share of the profits. The company took over all Hancock's goodwill and plant, the latter comprising, "6 perforating presses, 1 vice, about 2,000 perforating pine (3 sorts), 552 perforating dies, sundry tools and a work bench". The business was successful for several years, but, about 1892, Hancock died and thereafter business gradually declined and the Company was struck off in 1898.

Sidney Allchin, the postmaster at Englands Lane, Hampstead. N.W., first advertised as a stamp perforator in the Post Office London Directory in 1881, but actually commenced business in a small way about 1877, using a machine of his own contrivance. Allchin died in 1883 and his business was carried on by his son as Sidney Allchin & Co. The firm was still trading until as recently as 1937 when it amalgamated with Slopers and moved to 22 Bridge Row. The name Sidney Allchin & Co. was retained for some years but ceased to be used in 1943.

The last of the four, Frank Braham was the postmaster at Tabernacle Street, E.C, and began as a stamp perforator about 1883. Like Sloper and Hancock, he also manufactured hand perforating presses for sale, these being made at his factory in

Hoxton Square, N. Braham was almost certainly a rogue, using his office as postmaster to imply, as Sloper did to a lesser extent, that his perforating business was officially recognised. He pestered London business firms with circulars describing his services, bearing unauthorised facsimiles of postage stamps with perforated initials, and with a coat of arms at the head beside the words "Post Office, Tabernacle Street, London, E.C." In this way, Braham acquired a substantial number of clients, among them Thomas Cook & Son, London Chatham & Dover Railway, James Schoolbred & Co., and the City, Birkbeck, Joint Stock, Union, and London & South Western Banks.

One of Braham's circulars, dated 29th November 1886, arrived at the offices of Bower, Cotton & Bower, Solicitors in Chancery Lane, who sent it to the G.P.O. They said it was misleading, that the Coat of Arms should not have been used, nor should the circular date stamp of the Tabernacle Street Post Office.

The G.P.O., who had already warned Braham not to use the facsimile of the 1d Lilac on his circulars, thereupon advised him that the Coat of Arms should not be used and that his appointment as postmaster would be terminated at once if his stock of circulars were not destroyed, and that a most serious view would be taken of any future misconduct. Braham apologised, agreed to destroy his circulars, and to behave in future, but reported that Sloper was also using a Coat of Arms on his circulars. This was true, in fact Sloper had been using a Coat of Arms for something like ten years, but he had taken the precaution of adding the words "By Her Majesty's Royal Letters Patent" - "By Special Appointment". Even so, it seems unlikely that a grant of Letters Patent entitled the grantee to use a Coat of Arms, but the Post Office did not pursue the matter.

To end this chapter - and indeed the article - one further piece of information may be of interest. In March 1897 the Post Office wrote to J. Sloper & co., asking by what authority they described themselves in their circulars as "Contractors to H.M. Government". They replied as follows :

"Having been contractors to Her Majesty's Stationery Office, supplied perforated initialled stamps to Her Majesty's Office of Works, and perforating machines to most of the Government offices and our name being on the list in ti.M.S.O, of persons to be invited to tender for the supply of perforating machines, we venture to think that we have acquired the right to describe ourselves as Contractors to H.M. Government.

The Post Office thereupon wrote to the Office of Works and Stationery Office for confirmation of what Slopers had said. On the 14th June 1897 the Office of Works replied:

"In reply . . . . . I am directed by the First Commissioner of Her Majesty's Office of Works to state . . . . . that this department has at present no transactions with Mr. Sloper and that the Board have for more than a year ceased to use the perforated stamps referred to in his letter. . . . .

The Stationery Office replied that Slopers had not supplied perforating machines to them since 1882 and the G.P.O. then advised Slopers that they must not in future describe themselves as Contractors to the Government.

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